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# **EULOGIUM**

ON

**THOMAS JEFFERSON,**

DELIVERED BEFORE

**The American Philosophical Society,**

ON THE

ELEVENTH DAY OF APRIL 1827.

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By **NICHOLAS BIDDLE.**

**Published at the request of the Society.**

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*Hall of the Society,  
13th April 1827.*

*At a Special Meeting of the American Philosophical Society, held to-day, the following Resolutions were adopted :*

*Resolved, That the thanks of the Society be presented to Mr Biddle for the able manner in which he performed the duty which they had assigned to him, in pronouncing the Eulogium of their former President, Thomas Jefferson.*

*Resolved, That a copy of the Eulogium be requested of Mr Biddle, for publication.*

*Extract from the Minutes.*

*G. ORD, Secretary.*





## EULOGIUM.

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*Mr President and Gentlemen  
of the Philosophical Society,*

**W**E are assembled to render the customary honours to the late president of our society, Thomas Jefferson. These are melancholy, yet not unavailing duties. The object of them lies far beyond the reach of our applause, but the homage which cannot benefit the dead, may console and instruct the living. And rarely have higher honours been conferred on any human being than were recently bestowed on Jefferson and his illustrious companion in fame and in death, when a great people whom they had long served, forgetting all the collisions which once embittered the strife of power, crowded round their open graves with so subdued and mingled a sorrow, that for the first time perhaps in the history of the world, the regrets of a whole nation were blended in the funeral train of their rival chieftains. Be it our office, as their more immediate associates in this society, to close this mournful procession; to give the last look down that tomb into which we shall all soon

follow them, and then pausing from the pursuits of the world dedicate a few moments to the memory of Jefferson.

Of his private life little need now be said, as its details will be conveyed to posterity by the works which he has himself bequeathed. It will be more becoming in this humble testimonial to draw merely the outline of his personal history, to dwell on the acts by which he will be most distinguished, and endeavour to render the review not wholly unproductive by recommending to our imitation whatever may seem exemplary.

In doing this we may shun the useless effort to separate his abstract and philosophical character from the active career of public service which estranged him from his studies. Jefferson was the president of this society whose purpose is "the promotion of useful knowledge." Within that wide circle all the pursuits beneficial to man find their appropriate place, and it were far too limited an estimate of philosophy to restrict its name to learned abstractions or to the study of inferior and inanimate nature. The noblest object of creation is man; the highest studies are those which advance his moral dignity and improve his intellectual and physical condition. While, therefore, metaphysical and natural science offer their tempting difficulties and their inexhaustible discoveries to exercise and reward ambition, the palm of more certainty of knowledge and more usefulness of result may be assigned to those pursuits which influence the destiny of men through the means of social institutions and wise legislation, and the studies which these demand may well place their followers in the front ranks of philosophy. It was indeed characteristic of Jefferson, that all his actions were

imbued by his learning—that, to use his own expression, “his long life was as much devoted to study as a faithful transaction of the trusts committed to him would permit,” and that his peculiar genius enabled him to unite the retired love of science with the practical energy of the world. No part therefore of his varied career will be foreign to our present purpose of commemorating his services and estimating his character.

Thomas Jefferson was born on the 2d day of April 1743, in the county of Albemarle in Virginia. His ancestors had at an early period emigrated from England to that colony where his grandfather was born. Of that gentleman little is known, and of his son the only circumstance much circulated is, that he was one of the commissioners for settling the boundary between Virginia and North Carolina, and assisted in forming the map of Virginia, published under the name of Fry and Jefferson. These occupations require and presuppose studies of a liberal and scientific nature—but his character presents nothing remarkable; and our Thomas Jefferson, instead of the accidental lustre which may be conferred by distinguished ancestry, enjoys the higher glory of being the first to illustrate his name. The patrimony derived from them placed him in a condition of moderate affluence, far beyond want yet not above exertion, that temperate zone of life most propitious to the culture of the heart and the understanding. He received his education at the college of William and Mary; on leaving which, he commenced the study of law under Chancellor Wythe, and after attaining his majority was elected a member of the state legislature. During several years afterwards he was engaged in a successful and lucrative practice—and it is attested by

one\*, eminently fitted by his own merit to appreciate that of others, that his arguments, which are still preserved, on the most intricate questions of law, prove his ability to reach the highest honours of his profession. Undoubtedly the vigour of mind which he could bring to any pursuit would have rendered him distinguished in it; but his repugnance to public speaking would probably have prevented his attaining great eminence as an advocate, and we may not regret that the intellectual discipline and acuteness of that profession were soon applied to his duties as a member of the legislature, and to those liberal studies which prepared him for the great crisis which was rapidly approaching. Of that event the first impulse was to startle into vigour the whole intellect of the country, to summon all its citizens to active duties, and to make every occupation and every profession yield up its brightest and its bravest to the camp and the senate. It is at such an hour, compared to which the excitements of ordinary existence are utterly spiritless, that the native strength of the human character is displayed in the moral sublimity of its nature. It is then are roused from the depths of their own musings the master spirits whom the common interests of life could not tempt from their seclusion, but who now come forth with the contagious enthusiasm of genius, and assume at once the dominion which less gifted minds are content to acknowledge and obey. In this commotion of all the original intellects of America, Jefferson yielded at once to the inspiration, and was from that hour devoted to the great cause of freedom.

In the year 1774 he was elected a member of the con-

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\* Mr Wirt, Attorney General of the United States.

vention of Virginia which appointed the delegates to the first congress; but being prevented by sickness from reaching the seat of government, he sent on a project of the instructions with which he thought these delegates should be furnished. Struck by its force the convention caused it to be published under the name of "A summary of the rights of British America, set forth in some resolutions intended for the inspection of the present delegates of the people of Virginia now in convention, by a native and member of the house of burgesses." This was the first work of Jefferson, then a youth of <sup>31</sup>~~twenty~~ one years of age, and is so characteristic of its author, that it contains all the germs of those principles and modes of thought and even of expression which his subsequent life developed and matured. Although published in a form different from that originally designed, it is in fact a series of resolutions which he had intended to move in the convention instructing the deputies in congress from Virginia to propose an address to the king representing the complaints of the American colonies. Its form is therefore somewhat technical, but in enumerating the causes of complaint, the resolutions are so blended with the reasons of them, as to present a full view of the encroachments of the British government. But its most striking peculiarity is its general tone and spirit, which make it the natural precursor of the declaration of independence.

The delegates are instructed to represent to the king their hopes, "that this their joint address, penned in the language of truth and divested of those expressions of servility which would persuade his majesty that we are asking favours and not rights, shall obtain from his majesty a more respectful acceptance; and this his majesty will think we have reason to expect when he

“reflects that he is no more than the chief officer of the people, appointed by the laws and circumscribed with definitive powers to assist in working the great machine of government erected for their use and consequently subject to their superintendence.”

The wrongs of the colonies are then recapitulated in a strain of eloquent boldness, till kindling with the enthusiasm of the subject he concludes thus :

“These are our grievances, which we have thus laid before his majesty with that freedom of language and sentiment which becomes a free people claiming their rights as derived from the laws of nature, and not as the gift of their chief magistrate. Let those flatter who fear, it is not an American art. To give praise which is not due might be well from the venal, but would ill beseem those who are asserting the rights of human nature. They know, and will therefore say, that kings are the servants, not the proprietors, of the people. Open your breast, sire, to liberal and expanded thought; let not the name of George the Third be a blot on the page of history. You are surrounded by British counsellors, but remember that they are parties. You have no ministers for American affairs, because you have none taken from among us, nor amenable to the laws on which they are to give you advice. It behoves you therefore to think and to act for yourself and your people. The great principles of right and wrong are legible to every reader; to pursue them requires not the aid of many counsellors. The whole art of government consists in the art of being honest. Only aim to do your duty, and mankind will give you credit where you fail.....We are willing on our own part to sacrifice every thing which reason can ask to the restoration of that tranquillity for which all must

“wish. On their part let them be ready to establish  
 “union and a generous plan. Let them name their  
 “terms, but let them be just. Accept of every com-  
 “mercial preference it is in our power to give for such  
 “things as we can raise for their use or they make for  
 “ours. But let them not think to exclude us from  
 “going to other markets to dispose of those commodities  
 “which they cannot use or to supply those wants which  
 “they cannot supply. Still less let it be proposed  
 “that our properties within our own territories shall be  
 “taxed or regulated by any power on earth but our own.  
 “The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same  
 “time; the hand of force may destroy but cannot disjoin  
 “them. This, sire, is our last, our determined resolu-  
 “tion.”

The reputation acquired by this production, naturally directed the eyes of the legislature towards him, when in the following year, 1775, it became necessary to answer what was called “the conciliatory proposition” of lord North. This offer was, that if any colony would defray the expense of its own government and its own defence, it should be exempt from taxation by parliament except for the regulation of trade, which tax should still be levied for the account of the colony. The acceptance of this proposal the answer denounced in a tone of indignation, as seducing them from their fidelity to their American brethren. The conclusion is worthy of of such magnanimity:

“For ourselves we have exhausted every mode of ap-  
 “plication which our invention could suggest as proper  
 “and promising. We have decently remonstrated with  
 “parliament, they have added new injuries to the old.  
 “We have wearied our king with supplications, he has  
 “not deigned to answer us. We have appealed to the



have honour and justice of the British nation, their efforts in our favour have been ineffectual. What remains to be done? That we commit our injured case to the even handed justice of that Being who doth not regard persons, earnestly beseeching him to illuminate the minds of our rulers and prosper the endeavours of those to whom we have confided her hopes, that through their exertions we may again see reunited the blessings of peace, prosperity, and harmony with Great Britain."

The extraordinary freedom of this answer acquired it the distinction of being proscribed in a bill passed in the house of lords, and excepted from the pardon authorized to the rest of his rebellious associates.

By the impulse of events and of his own genius he was driven onward, and in the same year he was elected to the congress of the union, and joined that assembly at Philadelphia in June 1775. It was then that he came face to face, the men with whom he had been co-operating, that he first knew Franklin, Adams and all the strong intellects and the firm spirits whom they were surrounded. Among these he was immediately recognized, by the instinct which drew together kindred minds in times of danger, and he felt himself worthy to share their deepest counsels. He was fearless in temper, fertile in resources, pouring out the stores of his accumulated knowledge, and though indisposed for public display, he stood above them all for the energy of his mind. He could convey his and their own strong feelings to men who came to know each other as adversaries, to feel the full consciousness of their own power. It was utterly impossible that they should be routed into submission or ever be

driven back into their colonial allegiance. The fearful inequality of force seems already overmatched by the greater leaders and the nobler cause—nor can despair find any place in this controversy about the rights of men, between lord North and lord Dartmouth and the Earl of Hillsborough on one side, and on the other Washington, Franklin, the Adamss, and Jefferson,—a contest between the forgotten mediocrity of respectable persons in office, and the enduring genius of the founders of a great empire.

The succeeding year feassembled them in that congress of 1776, destined to form an æra in history, and which is still without an equal or a rival among all the public bodies which have swayed the fate of nations. They soon perceived that this colonial and proscribed existence was no longer tolerable, and that the hour had now come when all their strength was to be summoned up for a final renunciation of the dominion of England. To announce and to vindicate this determination was assigned to Jefferson, who then composed that state paper which has given to its author so memorable a celebrity under the name of the declaration of independence.

It is a decisive proof of the consideration which he enjoyed in congress, that in selecting five of their most distinguished members for the solemn purpose of composing this instrument, Jefferson, although only thirty-three years of age and one of the youngest members of congress, received the greatest number of votes, and of course presided over the committee. When they met, they delegated to Jefferson and John Adams the task of preparing the sketch of it—and then after some mutual expressions from each that the other should perform it, Jefferson yielded to the wishes of his elder colleague,

and repairing to his lodgings betook himself to the great work allotted to him. These lodgings—it will be heard with pleasure by all who feel the interest which genius inspires for the minutest details of its history—he had selected with his characteristic love of retirement in a house recently built on the outskirts of the city, and almost the last dwelling house to the westward, where in a small family he was the sole boarder. That house is now a warehouse in the centre of Philadelphia, standing at the south west corner of Market and Seventh streets, and on the second story were the rooms of Jefferson where the declaration of Independence was written. He then presented it to the committee by whom only a few slight and verbal alterations were made at the suggestion of Franklin and Adams, but in its progress through congress it underwent several modifications. The author seems to have deemed these changes injurious, but posterity will not I think concur in this opinion. There were several phrases inspired by the first ardour of composition which were advantageously omitted or altered, and a passage on the slave trade, eminently beautiful in itself, was retrenched by the severer judgment of congress, as calculated to excite unnecessary irritation in the south. But the changes are comparatively so few, that in all literary justice the authorship of it must be ascribed to Jefferson. A fastidious criticism has objected to some of its expressions, and to the universal accuracy of some of its abstract propositions. These may be readily vindicated, nor is there more foundation for the reproach of an undue harshness towards the character of the sovereign of England. With whatever kindness we may regard the reputation of that king in many respects so estimable, the measures which his government was pursuing towards

America warranted every severity of language, and moreover great efforts of power and of passion cannot be appreciated without reference to the excitements which inspired them. The protracted struggle with England had irritated the mind of the country to an anxious exasperation. In taking the final step decisive of their own and their country's fortunes, it was no part of the policy of its leaders to soften these feelings, but rather to awaken the passions, to rouse all the indignation of their countrymen, and to direct their full and concentrated and impetuous energy against their oppressors. And then its very roughness is appropriate. It were scarce seemly that the corner stone of this great temple of freedom should be overpolished. It is well that its stern massiveness should accord with the strong and doric simplicity of the columns it sustains. It is well that the racy and even impassioned originality of this indignant remonstrance against the abuses of power should remain like the chisel marks of the great sculptor of Italy as if in disdain of minute perfections. There was nothing equal to it, there was nothing like it in all the revolutions resembling our own, neither by the Swiss who overthrew the dominion of the house of Austria, nor the Portuguese in annulling their allegiance to Spain, nor the Dutch in their successful resistance to their foreign rulers. Even in the annals of England, the noblemen who at Runymede extorted from their sovereign the great charter gave no reasons but their swords, and the barbarous and feudal latinity of that long paper grates with almost as harsh a dissonance on our ears as it did on those of the reluctant signer of it. In still later times, when the house of commons alarmed Charles the First into an acknowledgment of their liberties scarcely inferior to the great charter itself, the "petition

"of right" which secured them has the verbose formality of a legal record. But it was among the many distinctions of this great quarrel to be announced in a strain corresponding with its dignity. It was essentially an intellectual warfare, a contest of prophecy, in which they who would not brook the practical oppression went out to resist the principle, and where mere success would have lost its value unless it was proved to be deserved. To accomplish this they warned the British government, they besought the British nation, in those admirable addresses which invoked equally the reason and the feelings of the parent state, till wearied with unheeded remonstrance and finding no resource but in their own hearts, they made this their last appeal to God alone.

Accordingly the declaration of independence is among the noblest productions of the human intellect. It stands apart, alike the first example and the great model of its species—of that simple eloquence worthy of conveying to the world and to posterity the deep thoughts and the stern purposes of a proud yet suffering nation. It contains nothing new, for the grave spirits of that congress were too intent on their great work to aspire after ambitious novelties. But it embodies the eternal truths which lie at the foundation of all free governments. It announces with singular boldness and self possession their wrongs and their determination to redress them. It sustains that purpose in a tone of such high and manly and generous enthusiasm—it breathes around an atmosphere of so clear and fresh an elevation, and then it concludes with such an heroic self devotion, that it is impossible even at this distant day to hear it without a thrill to the soul. It seems like the gushing out of an oppressed but still unconquered spirit; the voice of a wounded nation unsubdued even in its agony. They

have at last met;—the genuine descendants of the northern pilgrims, of Penn, and of Raleigh;—they have come from the far extremes of climate, of tastes, and of manners, to this the common battle-field, for the great principles of freedom, equally dear to them all. They feel untamed within them the adventurous spirit which first planted their race on this desert; and they bring to this desperate struggle the stubborn devotedness of purpose, the unyielding calmness of resolution, and the impetuous passions infused with the blood of their ancestry. But the chivalry with which these ancestors threw themselves on the ocean, to leave their homes and to make their country, was even less heroic than this proud defiance to the unbroken power of England. Their fathers came here because they would not endure the intolerance they left behind, and they brought with them the stern uncompromising temper which they had shared with the roused spirit of England during that tempest in which the commonwealth was established and overthrown. It could not be that such men would long obey the dominion of strangers; or that having built up their sequestered place of refuge where they might breathe to God their vows in their own sincere simplicity, and lie in the sunny spots which they had hewed out of the wilderness beyond the reach of the cold shade of power, they would ever submit to see their harvests reaped by the hands which had driven them into exile. At the first signal of oppression they had started into resistance. Their early reverses only hardened the temper they could not subdue,—and now, they stand so erect in the desperation of their fortunes, so young, so weak, so lonely,—yet even in that moment of danger their voice is as firm, their demeanour as lofty, as in the earliest glow of their

prosperity, and after reciting their wrongs in the tone rather of a conqueror than a suppliant, they renounce forever the dominion which had ceased to deserve their allegiance, and then raise the standard of their own young freedom to perish for it, or to perish with it. Their success has consecrated that standard to aftertimes, and in every land where men have struggled against oppression their dreams have been of that declaration of independence which is now the magna charta of humanity.

In the September following he was appointed a commissioner to France in conjunction with Franklin and Deane, but in consequence of the state of his family he declined accepting it, and having resigned his seat in congress was elected a member of the house of delegates of Virginia which met in October 1776. While there, he was appointed, in conjunction with Wythe and Pendleton, to prepare a code of laws for that state. Of these distinguished associates, one died in the progress of the work, and the other withdrew from it, so that the burthen and the glory of this service belong to Jefferson. After being occupied with it for more than two years, he presented to the legislature in June 1779 the result of his labours in what is called the revised code. Its object was to simplify the laws, by reducing into a single code the whole body of the British statutes and of the common law, so far as they were applicable to Virginia, and the acts of the state legislature. This mere revision could have been accomplished by ordinary jurists, but that which stamps the work with the seal of his peculiar genius was the adaptation of the laws of Virginia to its new political condition. It was evident that as no form of political constitution can be permanent unless sustained by a corresponding legislation, it was necessary

to readjust the foundations of the commonwealth, and more especially to modify the laws with regard to slavery, to entails, to primogeniture, and to religion.

He had begun by obtaining the passage of a law prohibiting the further importation of slaves. His plan for their gradual emancipation was this:—All slaves born after the establishment of the law were to be free, to continue with their parents until a certain age, then to be brought up to useful callings at the public expense until the age of eighteen for females, and twenty-one for males, when they were to be sent with implements of war and husbandry to some colony, where they should be protected until able to defend themselves. In the same spirit, the constitution which he prepared in 1783 contained a provision against the introduction of slaves, and for the emancipation of all born after the year 1800. To estimate the merit of these enlightened views, it is not sufficient to remember that they were proposed in the bosom of a slave population by a statesman whose fortunes were to be affected by them—but it is essential to contrast them with the conduct of those in other countries who have presumed to reproach the inhabitants of America with their system of slavery. If indeed there be any people on earth who should be exempt from censure for holding slaves, it must be the people of this country. Unquestionably it is among the things to be forgiven, and forgotten too unless recalled by the rebukes of others, that over the fairest portions of this country, in defiance of the petition and remonstrance and persevering legislation of its inhabitants, the ministry of England persisted in breathing this fatal pestilence, for the sole reason that to buy or to steal black men on the coast of Africa, and sell them into slavery on the coast of America, was a lucrative employment of British



capital. Even in this very year 1783, while these owners of slaves were intent on a generous sacrifice of their interests in compassion to the human race, when the society of Friends presented to the British parliament the first petition against the slave trade, it was dismissed with the calm politeness of lord North, who "regretted" that the trade against which the petition was so justly "directed was in a commercial view necessary to almost every nation in Europe."

His second measure was the abolition of entails. Governments, which extend equal rights to all their citizens, can be best maintained by preventing any excessive inequality of condition among them, consistent with the full exercise of individual power over the fruits of industry. The law of entail, as transferred from England, had so seconded the natural tendency to build up large fortunes, that, to use the language of Jefferson, "by accumulating immense masses of property in single lines of families, it had divided our country into two distinct orders of nobles and plebeians." Against such tendencies, as inconsistent with the improved condition of the state, he succeeded in obtaining a law.

He resisted with equal success another part of the system which assigned an unequal distribution of fortune among the members of the same family. To the moral sense it seems a strange perversity to bestow on the oldest and strongest of any family the inheritance of the common parent,—that to him who needs least most should be given, while to the helplessness of infancy and the inexperience of the gentler sex are denied what is most necessary for their subsistence and protection. It requires all the exigencies of a political system to bend the natural feelings of mankind to such an arrangement; and the moment this artificial policy ceases its claims,

the moment it is no longer necessary to make one domestic despot in order to swell the number of public tyrants; what parent would bequeath to his children this inheritance of disunion and injustice? Jefferson accordingly established an equal division of property among all the children of the same family.

The easy naturalization of foreigners, the proportioning of punishment to crimes, and the establishment of common schools throughout the state, form other parts of his system. But there remained one great achievement, the security of religious freedom.

The church of England, as established in Virginia, required a permanent contribution for its support from every citizen, and a law of the state prescribed that any person of either sex, unless protestant dissenters exempted by act of parliament, who omitted to attend the church service for one month should be fined and in default of payment receive corporal punishment. The neighbourhood of Maryland appears to have excited no tenderness towards the religion of that state; for if any person suspected to be a Catholic refused to take certain oaths, he was subjected to the most degrading disqualifications. To undermine this fanaticism, Jefferson began by procuring a suspension of the salaries of the clergy for one year. Other years of similar suspense succeeded, till at length the public sentiment was prepared for his plan, which formed originally part of the revised code, but was not finally enacted until the year 1786, when during his absence the care of it devolved on the kindred mind of him who was equally worthy to be his friend in all stations and his successor in the highest, James Madison. The preamble of this law explains its motives with a nervous eloquence. "Our civil rights," it asserts, "have no dependence on our religious opinions,

"more than our opinions in physics or geometry, that  
 "therefore the proscribing every citizen as unworthy of  
 "public confidence by laying upon him an incapacity  
 "of being called to the offices of trust or emolument,  
 "unless he profess or renounce this or that religious  
 "opinion, is depriving him injuriously of those privileges  
 "and advantages to which in common with his fellow  
 "citizens he has a natural right; that it tends also to  
 "corrupt the principles of that very religion it is meant  
 "to encourage, by bribing with a monopoly of worldly  
 "honours and emoluments those who will externally  
 "profess and conform to it." And accordingly the law  
 declares "That no man shall be compelled to frequent  
 "or support any religious worship, place, or ministry  
 "whatsoever, nor shall he be enforced, restrained, mo-  
 "lested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall  
 "otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions,  
 "but that all men shall be free to profess and by argu-  
 "ment to maintain their opinion in matters of religion,  
 "and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge,  
 "or affect their civil capacities." The long enjoyment  
 of this blessing has diminished our sensibility to its  
 value, for to the people of this country it is scarcely  
 conceivable how one class of citizens shall proscribe  
 another class for a different mode of worshipping the  
 same deity, nor can we imagine any more melancholy  
 triumph of prejudice over the justice and the charities  
 of our nature than the strange intolerance which in the  
 country of our ancestors still resists the liberal spirit of  
 the age. Without presuming to mingle in a question  
 exclusively her own, we may be permitted to hope, for  
 her own fair fame, that she will be able to reconcile the  
 claims of power and the rights of conscience, and that  
 this remnant of ancient policy which at once corrupts

the church and weakens the state may be discarded with the bigotry or the danger which suggested it.

On completing the revised code, he was elected in the year 1779 governor of Virginia, which place he held for two years. About that period Mr Marbois, of the French legation, being desirous of collecting information with regard to the United States, prepared certain queries, a copy of which he addressed to a member of congress from each of the states. The member from Virginia requested Jefferson to answer these inquiries. This he accordingly did in the year 1781, and enlarged his observations in the year 1782, when a few copies were printed for the use of his friends; but it was not until the year 1787 that the work appeared in its present form, under the unassuming title of "Notes on Virginia." A translation into French by the Abbé Morellet was printed at Paris in the same year. It professes to be an answer to Mr Marbois's queries in the order in which they were presented, and to give the outlines of the history, geography, and general statistics of Virginia. But it is not so much in the details of the work, though these are perfectly well digested, as in the free and manly sense, the fine philosophical temper, and the liberal feeling which pervade it, that consists its principal attraction. Constitutions, laws, the nature and consequences of domestic slavery, are all discussed with an impartiality which displays the independent spirit of the writer. Here too he overthrew the idle fancy of Buffon as to the inferiority of the animal creation of the new world. It is difficult not to admire the perfectly respectful and modest tone in which he ventures to differ from the greatest naturalist of his day on a question peculiarly within the province of his studies; yet the refutation is so complete as to leave no doubt that, even reasoning

on the materials accessible to both, Jefferson had the superiority.—Since then, the mammoth, and the western bear, and his own megalonyx have successfully vindicated our animals from this alleged inferiority, which is now exploded from natural history.

Having, in the Notes on Virginia stated the defects of its constitution, he proposed to remedy them in a form of government prepared in 1783, when it was expected that a convention would be assembled for that purpose; but as the convention was not called, the plan was appended to the Notes on Virginia. It now possesses peculiar interest as the depository of his matured opinions on the true organization of a commonwealth; and having preceded by some years the present constitution of the United States, may claim the merit of originality. It may be interesting to examine some of its peculiarities by the light of the political philosophy of the present day after the experience of more than half a century.

He proposed that the two branches of the legislature should be chosen by the free citizens enrolled in the militia, or possessing a real estate so small, as in fact to recognize what is now called universal suffrage. To this principle an undue importance seems attached by both its friends and its enemies, for in our institutions any discrimination which would be tolerated or tolerable could exclude only an inconsiderable number of voters. But the abstract axiom that all who fight and pay should vote, though strongly contested at that time and not generally acknowledged even now, will I think hereafter be regarded as essential to popular institutions.

He proposed that the judges should be chosen by both branches of the legislature, and hold their offices during good behaviour, being removable only by impeachment. This complete independence of the judi-

ciary all subsequent experience has emphatically recommended. To this department of the government he appears willing to assign more extensive powers than are now deemed necessary. The council of revision was to consist of three judges and two counsellors of state, who with the governor were to possess a negative on the acts of the legislature unless re-passed by two thirds of both houses, and he afterwards in commenting on the present constitution of the United States expressed his preference that in conferring the power of negative on the president, the judiciary should have "been associated for that purpose, or invested separately with a similar power." Experience however recommends more the present position of the judiciary in our institutions, for being entirely unconnected with the ordinary duties of the legislature, and taking no cognizance of the expediency of its acts, they can exercise with a more impartial judgment their appropriate function of carrying them into execution unless they conflict with the higher authority of the fundamental laws of the country.

The council of state, the council of revision, and the court of impeachment are obsolete incumbrances superseded by the modern improvements of an individual and indivisible executive, whose nominations to offices are revised by the senate, itself a court of impeachment.

He proposed further that the governor should be elected by the joint vote of the two branches of the legislature for five years, and then not be re-eligible. This choice of the executive by the legislature is not now regarded as a judicious combination. The truer theory is, that as his negative is meant to control the legislature, his independence on it should be secured by deriving his power from the highest source, the people. The denial of the privilege of re-election—after one

long term of service—would probably be more approved now than when he first suggested it.

On leaving the government of Virginia, he was appointed a minister plenipotentiary to unite with those already in Europe in negotiating a peace between the United States and England, but at the moment of embarking intelligence arrived of the signature of that treaty. He returned to congress in 1783, and in the following year was sent to Europe to join Franklin and John Adams as plenipotentiaries to arrange with the several powers of Europe their future commercial relations with the United States. They framed a treaty with Prussia only, after which Jefferson visited England for a few weeks in order to assist in an effort which proved abortive to make a treaty with that power. On the return of Franklin, he was appointed his successor as minister plenipotentiary to France, where he remained for several years. During his residence in Paris his public duties were chiefly confined to the details of the commercial intercourse between the two countries, and the diligent performance of these left him leisure for the cultivation of every species of liberal knowledge. His fame which had preceded him, and his public station, secured him a welcome reception in those circles which were at the head of European civilization; his house was the resort of all who were distinguished for science in the French capital: and his active mind did not fail to profit by these opportunities of enlarging the sphere of his acquirements and of accumulating every thing that promised to benefit his country. Among other instances may be mentioned his letter to the agricultural society of Charleston, detailing the information acquired during his visit to the south of France with regard to such productions as could be naturalized in the southern states,

and offering his services to facilitate the transmission of them. He recommends the caper, and more especially the olive of which he remarks, "having been myself an eye witness to the blessings which this tree sheds on the poor, I never had my wishes so kindled for the introduction of any article of new culture into our country." To this should be added that the south owes to him also the upland rice, which thriving out of the swamps may it is hoped one day supersede the lowland plant which, as he observes, "sows life and death with almost equal hand."

Near the close of his mission the revolution assembled at Paris the constituent assembly, whose leaders were naturally attracted towards the representative of the United States. It would have been fortunate for them as well as for France had they always possessed so judicious an adviser. Of the esteem in which he was held it is a singular evidence that when the two parties were unable to agree on the question of making the legislature consist of one or of two houses, they determined to consult Jefferson, and their respective chiefs, Sieyès, Barnave, Mounier, and others repaired to him in a body for that purpose. He strenuously recommended the division, but the majority could not be induced to acquiesce in his views, and they became sensible, when it was too late, of their error.

He returned from France in November 1789 on a visit to his family, but instead of resuming his place he yielded to the request of general Washington, and in April 1790 accepted the office of secretary of state under the new constitution. Here he soon evinced that in enlarging his acquirements he had lost none of his practical sagacity as a statesman. His department was in fact to be created, our diplomatic relations under the new government to be established, and



the general arrangement of our intercourse with foreign nations to be organized. Then arose the difficulties growing out of the French revolution, and it was his peculiar duty to sustain the rights of the country against the pretensions of England and France, and to vindicate the neutrality of our government. The interest of these discussions has passed with the occasion, as more recent facts and longer experience have in some degree superseded them; but there are three of his public labours at that period entitled to particular remembrance. The first is his report on foreign commerce, which anticipates the liberal policy of the present day as the true basis of our commercial intercourse—perfect equality to all who will reciprocate it, and restrictions only in self defence against the restrictions of others. The second is his correspondence with the British minister on the mutual complaints of the two countries—which combines with great force of reasoning and perspicuity of style a tone of dignified courtesy rarely seen in similar papers. The third is his report on weights and measures, which presents in a clear and condensed form all the knowledge of that day on this interesting and intricate question.

He withdrew from this station on the 1st of January 1794, and resumed his tranquil pursuits at home. These however he was not long suffered to enjoy, for in the year 1797 he was elected vicepresident of the United States, an office more considerable and more considered than it has since become. While two persons were selected, either of whom might be president, both were presumed qualified for it. The change which has since required that the office of each should be designated, though perfectly judicious in itself, has diminished the relative importance of the vicepresidency, and its dignity

was its chief consolation for its want of power. It was however filled with great distinction by Jefferson who, not content to remain inactive in any station, composed the system of rules known by the name of "Jefferson's Manual"; a digest of the parliamentary practice of England with such modifications as had been adopted by the senate or are suggested by the difference between the British and American legislatures. This small volume has so condensed the rules of legislative proceedings as to supersede except for occasional reference the works of Grey and Hatsell and the other treatises on the same subject, and is now the standard authority in congress and the state legislatures.

It was while about to assume this office that on the 6th of January 1797 the discernment of our society selected him as its president on the death of Rittenhouse. The answer to the committee who notified to him his election, may now be recalled with a melancholy pleasure. "The suffrage," says he, "of a body which comprehends whatever the American world has of distinction and philosophy in general is the most flattering incident of my life, and that to which I am most sensible. My satisfaction would be complete were it not for the consciousness that it is far beyond my titles. I feel no qualifications for this distinguished post but a sincere zeal for all the objects of our institution, and an ardent desire to see knowledge so disseminated through the mass of mankind that it may at last reach the extremes of society, beggars and kings." And then, alluding to the merits of his predecessors he remarks, "surely no society till ours within the same compass of time ever had to deplore the loss of two such members as Franklin and Rittenhouse." We may now add, with no unbecoming pride, that few societies can

boast such a succession of presidents as Franklin, Rittenhouse, Jefferson, Wistar, and Patterson.

The contributions of one so occupied as he necessarily became could not be numerous, yet our transactions attest that he was not an inactive member. The first of his communications was a letter to our late valued and accomplished colleague colonel Jonathan Williams on the barometrical measurement of the mountains of Virginia. The second was entitled "A memoir on the discovery of certain bones of a quadruped of the clawed kind in the western parts of Virginia," read on the 10th of March 1797. Its purpose was to explain that on digging in one of the nitre caves of Virginia the workmen discovered some bones of an extraordinary size, which on examination he believed to belong to the unquiculated quadrupeds of which the lion was the nearest; but inferring his general stature from these remains, he concluded that he must have been more than three times the size of the lion. He therefore gave him the name of megalonyx or great claw from the unusual size of that part, and assigned him a station at the head of the clawed animals, similar to that of the mammoth in regard to the elephant, the rhinoceros, and the hippopotamus. It was afterwards conjectured that the animal to which these bones belonged was the same with the megatherium, a species of bradypus or sloth, whose remains have been discovered in Paraguay. But a re-examination of them by professor Wistar satisfied him that they differed from the bones of the megatherium. This opinion has since been confirmed by the inquiries of Cuvier and other naturalists which have ended in the recognition of the animal by the appropriate name conferred by Jefferson of megalonyx, but have withdrawn some of his honours by degrading him from the family of the lion into

that of the bradypus or sloth. It should be remarked that Jefferson's belief of the similarity of the megalonyx to the lion was founded on a comparison of the bones of the first with the description of the second in Daubenton; but in a postscript to his memoir he states that he had seen an imperfect account of the discovery in Paraguay, and was struck by resemblances between the megalotherium and his megalonyx, but not having a detailed report of the former, he thought it better to retain the difference of name. It is probable that had the megalotherium been sufficiently described as it has since been, Jefferson would of himself have assigned to the megalonyx the place he now occupies.

A third communication was his description of a mould board for a plough, of the least resistance and the most certain and easy construction, taken from a letter to sir John Sinclair, and read in May 1798.

The mould board of a plough, when it receives the sod horizontally from the wing, has two functions to perform; the first is, to raise the sod to the proper height to be turned over, and then to raise one side of it so as actually to turn it over. The problem is to combine these movements in a form of mould board which offering the least resistance will require the least moving power. This he thought he had found in the form of a rising wedge, and a trial of several years satisfied him of the utility of his invention. Whether it will be generally adopted must be seen hereafter, but we may all enjoy what I well remember to have felt, when the presiding officer of the agricultural society of Paris delivered, with an appropriate commentary, a premium for this plough to be sent to the inventor, then president of the United States. It was equally gratifying to the moral sense as to the pride of country, that while the rulers of other

nations were busied with far other instruments than the plough, were calculating for far different purposes what would furnish the least resistance, were distributing honours to excite or reward the destruction of their fellowmen, our chief magistrate had triumphed in the competition to improve that earliest and noblest instrument of peace which disturbs only to bless the bosom of the earth, and was never yet perverted to oppression or injustice.

This was not the only distinction he received in France. He was a member of the Institute, that illustrious body—the intellectual nobility of Europe—which has long been the principal depository of the learning of the European continent. In the subdivision of its members, he was assigned to the “Class of History and Ancient Literature,” which, since the restoration of the Bourbons, has resumed its title of “The Royal Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres,” and consists of forty resident members, eight foreign associates, and sixty correspondents. The value of this honour may be inferred from the fact that Jefferson is the only citizen of our country on whom it has been bestowed, and from the character of his colleagues, the eight foreign associates being Jefferson of the United States, Rennel and Wilkins of England, Ouvaroff of Russia, Sestini of Italy, Héeren of Gottingen, Creuser of Heidelberg, and William Humboldt of Berlin.

His services were now to receive their highest reward by his advancement to the presidency of the United States on the 4th of March 1801, and his re-election in 1805. Of the political acts of his administration it is unnecessary to speak, as they have scarcely yet passed the shadowy confine which separates the passions of

party from the deliberate judgment of history; and it will be more grateful to seek in the annals of his chief magistracy what may endear it to science and philanthropy. Its great ornament undoubtedly is the acquisition of Louisiana. This was essentially a measure characteristic of him, in the true spirit of his own policy, a peaceful and fair exchange of equivalents between states for their mutual advantage. The ordinary additions of territory among nations come in the train of conquest and are yielded with reluctance and humiliation. It was reserved for Jefferson by a simple act of honest policy, too distinguished for its rarity, by a negotiation destitute of all the common attractions of successful artifice or violence, to double the extent and to secure the tranquillity of his country. Nor were the usual temptations to violence wanting. The obstruction of the right of deposit at New Orleans had roused the indignation of the country, and a proposal was made in congress to seize that city. But this excitement yielded to the more temperate counsels of Jefferson, who thought with Numa that no blood should be shed at the rites of the god Terminus; and who, by this addition to the mass of human happiness, by this winning over to civilization a country destined to be filled by a free and happy people, obtained a far purer and nobler glory than could be yielded by all the victories achieved in the conquest of Louisiana.

Having obtained peaceful possession of it he found a gratification equally characteristic in directing several voyages of discovery through various parts of it.

Of these the first in order and importance was the expedition of Lewis and Clarke to the Pacific ocean. This had always been a favourite object of his contemplation. Whilst minister in Paris, he proposed to Ledyard the

celebrated traveller, to cross from Kamschatka to Nootka sound and descending thence to the latitude of the Missouri proceed by that river to the United States. Ledyard embarked with great zeal in this adventure, and having obtained through the instrumentality of Jefferson the sanction of the empress Catharine, proceeded on his journey: but when he had reached the neighbourhood of Kamschatka, he was arrested and sent back into Poland by some caprice or suspicion of the Russian government. In the year 1792 Jefferson proposed to our society to raise by subscription a fund to engage some person to ascend the Missouri, and cross the mountains to the Pacific, and Mr André Michaux was employed for that purpose: but when he had proceeded as far as Kentucky he too was recalled by an order of the French minister. Not discouraged by these failures, on his elevation to the presidency he renewed the subject, and having obtained the necessary sanction from congress fitted out the expedition of Lewis and Clarke for the same purpose. Their instructions written with his own hand are among the most interesting of his works. They were already prepared and the party about to undertake their journey, when the cession of Louisiana to the United States gave to it additional interest and attraction. To this expedition were added those of major Pike to the sources of the Mississippi and afterwards to the Arkansas, of colonel Freeman up the Red river, and Messrs Hunter and Dunbar up the Washita. The particulars of these journeys were conveyed to the public in many works, which, containing as they do descriptions of regions the greater part of which had never been described nor even visited by civilized men, produced large acquisitions as well to geography as to the other sciences, of

all which the merit is especially due to the projector of them.

But a service to science not less brilliant and even more permanent was the establishment of the military academy at West Point. To war in every shape, as the worst mode of redressing injuries and as multiplying the evils it professes to remedy, his repugnance was invincible. But even to his philanthropic spirit, the philosophy of war, the knowledge of those combinations which give to intellect the sway over brutal force, the sciences which, though perverted to human destruction, are susceptible of a worthier destination, all these presented attractions which as a statesman or a lover of science it was difficult to resist. Accordingly, on fixing the peace establishment of the army in 1802, the engineers retained in service were assembled at West Point to form a military academy, and placed under the charge of his friend colonel Williams. This school has since expanded with the growing wants of the nation till it has become one of the most distinguished seminaries of military science in the world, and its accomplished disciples are now devoting to the improvement of the country the talents which are equally ready for its defence. But the merit of laying its foundation is due to the liberal and pacific counsels of Jefferson.

Among the duties of his office not the least grateful was the care of that unhappy race who once possessed this country. It need not be regretted, since it is in the order of providence, that tribes of savages should gradually yield to the progress of civilized men. But how many claims have they not on the kindness of those who supplant them?—the claim of ignorance on the superiority of our learning—the claim of weakness on our magnanimity—titles too often forgotten towards these remnants of



nations who are melting away on the edge of civilization, and who have been sometimes forced or tempted to exchange the soil of their own country for the means of indulging the vices of ours. Of these Indians Jefferson was the uniform friend and protector. He anticipated the period when, weaned from their wandering habits by the subdivision of property, they would insensibly sink into the mass of our communities, and he endeavoured to prepare that event, by reclaiming them from their natural propensity to war and encouraging their settlement in fixed habitations, by the distribution of implements of husbandry, by the establishment of schools, and above all by the rigorous execution of the laws designed to save them from the temptations of that passion—the disgrace of civilization but the fatal curse of savage life. In these he was eminently successful, and the southern tribes most advanced in civilization owe much of their progress to his paternal solicitude.

He had also been particularly attentive to the study of Indian languages. He lost no opportunity of acquiring the most accurate information with regard to them, and had accumulated a great mass of knowledge which he intended to give to the world, when the shipwreck of the vessel containing his manuscripts obliged him to postpone his purpose.

At the expiration of his second term of service he declined a re-election, and withdrawing to his farm at Monticello resumed the favourite studies and occupations from which his public duties had so long withheld him. On this spot, endeared by attachments which had descended with it from his ancestors, and scarcely less cherished from the embellishments with which his own taste had adorned it; on this elevated seclusion, of which more than forty years ago Chastelleux had said, "it

“seemed as if from his youth he had placed his mind as  
 “he had his house upon a high situation, from which he  
 “might contemplate the universe,” he appears to have  
 realized all that the imagination can conceive of a happy  
 retirement, that blessing after which all aspire, but so  
 few are destined to enjoy. There lies in the depths of  
 every heart, that dream of our youth and the chastened  
 wish of manhood, which neither cares nor honours can  
 ever extinguish, the hope of one day resting from the  
 pursuits which absorb us; of interposing between our old  
 age and the tomb some tranquil interval of reflection,  
 where, with feelings not subdued but softened, with pas-  
 sions not exhausted but mellowed, we may look calmly  
 on the past without regret and on the future without  
 apprehension. But in the tumult of the world this  
 vision forever recedes as we approach it; the passions  
 which have agitated our life disturb our latest hour; and  
 men go down to the tomb, like the sun into the ocean,  
 with no gentle and gradual withdrawing of the light of  
 life back to the source which gave it, but sullen in its  
 beamless descent, with all its fiery glow, long after it  
 has lost its power and its splendour.—Not so Jefferson—  
 He was the first to announce that years had produced  
 an effect certainly not sensible to others and to obey  
 the voice within which warned him into private life.  
 There, surrounded by all that can give lustre or enjoy-  
 ment to existence, an exalted reputation, universal  
 esteem, the means of indulging in the studies most  
 congenial to him, a numerous and affectionate family,  
 enlivened by the pilgrimage of strangers who hastened  
 to see what they had so long venerated, a correspon-  
 dence that still preserved his sympathies with the world  
 he had left, blessed with all the consolations which  
 gently slope the decline of life, he gave up to philoso-

phical repose the remainder of that existence already protracted beyond the ordinary limits assigned to men. But it was not in his nature to be unoccupied and his last years were devoted to an enterprise every way worthy of his character. Aware how essentially free institutions depend on the diffusion of knowledge, he endeavoured to establish in his native state a seminary of learning; and his success may be seen in the rising prosperity of the University of Virginia, his last and crowning work, which has scarcely an equal in the annals of science. Such institutions have generally been founded by sovereigns whose merit lay in giving this liberal direction to some portion of the public revenue; by wealthy individuals who bestow the superfluity which they cannot enjoy in this world nor carry to the next; by the founders of sects who thus perpetuate their pride in the diffusion of their doctrines. But the zeal of Jefferson was as disinterested as his success was extraordinary. To operate on the miscellaneous and variable materials of all large public bodies, to excite them to a due conception of this great undertaking, to stimulate them in its progress, and infusing into them his own enthusiasm to conciliate their good will towards expenditures far exceeding their original expectations, all these which would have occupied and rewarded the whole life of an ordinary man, were the work of a few years of the old age of Jefferson. Of this magnificent scheme much of the honour is due to the legislative bodies who yielded to the salutary influence of his counsels; but the chief merit is undoubtedly his, and to him especially belongs the rare glory of founding an university, as a pure fountain of general knowledge, perverted by no obliquities of political or religious doctrine and tarnished by no narrow or selfish purpose.

With these delightful occupations were gratefully soothed the declining years of a life which had been, more than that of almost all other men, eminently a life of sunshine and of unvarying prosperity. But it was well said, let no man be deemed happy till his death; for even on the verge of his tranquil existence there was found room enough to plant that pang which seemed reserved at the closing hour to avenge the inequalities of fortune. This is an unwelcome theme, but the history of his life were imperfect without it, and perhaps his country which so often profited by his successes may yet learn something from his misfortunes. The long career of public employment which separated him from his domestic concerns, the incompetency of the emoluments annexed to his stations, the distinction which compelled him to the exercise of a simple yet costly hospitality, these with accidental disasters had so impaired his fortunes, that, as the shades of age and infirmity were gathering round him, there came in and sat down beside his hearth the cold and spectral form of poverty. In the luxuries of abundance men disregard that stern but distant being, whose invasion they think should be repelled by economy or disarmed by resignation. But these salutary truths cannot always repress the terrors of this startling intruder. They who have not known prosperity may go on unrepining till life is exhausted in the habitual struggle with their destiny. But to those who were born to affluence, whose habits have softened under its influence, and whose cultivated minds render them doubly sensitive to the happiness of all around them, the change comes with an almost overwhelming reality. They see the weakness to whose wants they once ministered, yet feel the decay of their power to relieve it, they mark one by one the silent abstraction of those

enjoyments which soothed the infirmities of our nature, till at length they are left to brood in despair over the wrecks of fallen fortunes, to gaze on the widening circle of domestic sorrow, and to witness that ruin which they did not make yet cannot repair. This affliction in all its acuteness, not for himself, but for those who depended on him, seems to have been the lot of Jefferson. But the philosophy which he had cultivated teaches men to make their own destiny, to be unmoved by prosperous or adverse events, and to bear the ills of life, as incidents to its nature, sent to warn but not to subdue us. He was faithful to these principles, and as success had never disturbed his equanimity, adversity only displayed in him the dignity of misfortune. His descent from power into poverty attested his purity, and his devotion to the public service, which in generous minds naturally inspires a disregard of personal interests. He therefore neither desponded nor complained, but prepared with a scrupulous fidelity to surrender his earnings and his patrimony, his chosen home, the scene of his attachments and his enjoyments, and then to retreat to some possession which would still survive the claims of justice, and furnish a last refuge and a grave. The knowledge of it aroused his countrymen to efforts which but for his death might have relieved him. But it is not less worthy of his country to consider whether this inadequate provision for public services should continue, in hostility to all the principles of our institutions, by proscribing from the service of the state men of humble fortunes, and rendering the life of a statesman a perpetual struggle between his domestic duties and the impulses of a generous ambition. We may hereafter outgrow this weakness of our youth, but it is a subject of melancholy instruction that the last days of Jefferson were clouded by anxieties

which the country for its own glory should have averted or relieved.

The time however had arrived when his cares and his existence were to end. His health had been through life singularly robust, as the vigorous frame which nature had bestowed on him was preserved by habits of great regularity and temperance. But for some months previous to his death he was obviously declining, and at length the combination of disease and decay terminated his life on the 4th day of July 1826 in the 84th year of his age. He died with the firmness and self possession native to his character, and the last hours of his existence were cheered and consecrated by the return of that day when of all others it was most fit that he should die—the birth day of his country. He felt that this was his appropriate resting place, and he gave up to God his enfeebled frame and his exhausted spirit on the anniversary almost of that hour which half a century before had seen him devoting the mature energies of his mind and the concentered affections of his heart to the freedom of his country.

So lived and died Thomas Jefferson, a name illustrious in our day and destined to an enduring fame hereafter. The attempt to analyse his genius and to estimate his services will aptly follow this recital of his personal history.

The peculiar character of the mind of Jefferson was its entire originality. There was nothing feeble nor ordinary in the structure of that intellect which, rejecting the common-places which pass, only because they go unchallenged, through the world and seeking for truth rather in nature than in received opinions, examined for itself, thought for itself, and yielded its convictions only to reason. This temper was nourished by the

severe studies which disciplined his youth, and confirmed by the indulgence in retirement of those deep and lonely moods of thought by which the noblest powers of the mind are nursed. In any country and at any time these powers would have rendered him distinguished; but while their direction was yet undetermined, the great conflict, which has occupied the last half century, between institutions and men, between the human race for freedom on one side and a few individuals for privileges on the other, found him on the verge of manhood, and awakened that impassioned devotion to freedom which shed its hues over all the studies and actions of his life. Among his contemporaries no one was more early or more deeply imbued with the spirit of his age, and few have contributed more to its diffusion. The youngest among the leaders of the revolution and at last almost the only survivor of them, he stood between two generations, and his free opinions which had startled the first race as hazardous innovations became during his life established truths among their posterity. This combination of an original mind impelled equally by the love of science and the love of freedom best reveals the true character of Jefferson and will best explain his whole history.

It is the first glory of his life, to have been one of the founders of a great and free empire, undoubtedly among the most distinguished events in the history of mankind. It was not, like the beginning of the Roman dominion, a fellowship of outlaws, commenced in pillage and cemented by fratricide—nor yet the establishment of the obscure dynasties and the village empires of most of the ancient legislators; but it was the deliberate achievement of the proudest spirits of their age, who, in the eye of the world and at their own imminent hazard, built up the loftiest

temple of free government ever reared among men. On its fairest column, among the companions of him who had no equal, is inscribed the name of Jefferson. From out that temple, this country, the young mother of nations, has poured forth her children, her language, and her institutions, to cultivate and to bless the new world. The unnumbered people, the thronged empires which will hereafter fill these happy regions, will in the fulness of their prosperity turn with filial reverence to those ancestors who laid the deep foundations of their freedom, and eminently to him who drew its great charter. The fame of that instrument may yet survive the freedom it proclaimed. But even in the decay and overthrow of this country the pilgrim strangers from the remotest lands of this many-nationed continent, who may trace back to its source in these desolate places the stream of their own greatness, shall still find in the eternal freshness of the fountains of freedom the memory of Jefferson.

It is scarcely less glorious that even among his own great associates he was distinguished by being at once a scholar and a statesman. If, as is unquestionable, among all the intellectual pursuits, the master science is that of government, in the hierarchy of human nature the first place must be conceded to those gifted spirits who after devoting their youth to liberal studies are attracted to the public service and attain its highest honours, shedding over their course the light of that pure moral and intellectual cultivation which at once illustrates them and adorns their country. It is thus that philosophy best fulfils her destiny, when coming from her seclusion into the arena of life she shares and leads in defending the cause of truth and freedom. This is not easy: for many who were conspicuous in



retirement. have failed in action, over burthened by their preparation, as men sink under the weight of their own armour. But to succeed—to combine the knowledge of the schools and of the world—to be learned in books and things and yet able to govern men, to deserve that most illustrious of all names—a philosophical statesman : this is at once the highest benefit which study can bestow on the world and the noblest reward which the world can confer on learning. This was the singular merit of Jefferson. "The whole of my life," said he to a friend, "has been at war with my natural tastes, feelings, and wishes. Domestic life and literary pursuits were my first and latest desire. Circumstances have led me along the path I have trodden, and like a bow long bent I resume with delight the character and pursuits for which nature designed me." Yet the influence of these tastes over his whole career was equally obvious and beneficial. It is this exhaustless love of study which enables the finer intellects to sustain the burthen of public duties, to resist the encroachments of that selfishness, and to overcome that disgust, which intense devotion to the business of the world is too prone to inspire. . . From that outer scene of contention with the passions and interests of others their retreat is to the fountain within, calming by its repose and freshening with its coolness the overstrained energy of the mind. Such was the attachment of Jefferson to these pursuits, that in the course of his long and active life there were few departments of learning which his inquisitive mind had not explored. Of law, not merely its technical forms, but the spirit of jurisprudence, the author of the revised code of Virginia proved himself a master ; and of his intimacy with that circle of knowledge which ministers to legislation and to inter-

national law, his successful execution of all the duties of a member of many legislative bodies, a minister, and a secretary of state, is the best testimony. The ample volume of ancient history and ancient languages,—of modern history and modern languages, was equally familiar to him. Mathematics, chemistry, astronomy, natural history, and natural philosophy, as well as the mechanic arts, were favourite pursuits, gracefully relieved by the studies of architecture and music : and all were connected and embellished by a wide range of miscellaneous literature. A greater mass of knowledge has often been accumulated by solitary students, and deeper researches have been doubtless made in all these sciences than consisted with the labours of an active statesman. But their prevailing charm lay in their perfect harmony with his social duties. They never obtruded, never outgrew their subordination to his public character, to which they imparted at once the strength of knowledge and the lustre of reputation. In a mind so vigorous they produced their natural fruits—perfect independence and simplicity. It is a truth of universal application, that they who are proud of their places confess their inferiority to them, and that the only true independence is the personal pride which is conscious that no position can exalt or humiliate it, and that in all times and under all circumstances the man predominates over the station. Jefferson accordingly felt that there are in the world much higher elevations than offices and far more alluring occupations than the struggles of political parties. He therefore neither sought nor shunned official stations, occupying them when they were voluntarily tendered but leaving them as willingly, and always communicating more distinction than he derived from them. But having assumed, he filled them, perfectly and

devotedly. Such indeed was the disciplined industry of his versatile mind, that after discharging all the duties of his station with a precision which the most laborious dulness might envy, his elastic spirit resumed his studies with fresh ardour or escaped to the charms of that social intercourse which he knew so well how to enjoy and adorn. He enjoyed and adorned it the more, because he carried into it that which in men, as in things, marks the last stage of refinement—entire simplicity. Too strong to need concealment—and too proud to descend to those artifices of dignity by which little minds dexterously veil their weakness, he was distinguished by the frankness and boldness with which all his thoughts were breathed to those around him—and for the unaffected simplicity of his manners. Even on that bleak eminence the presidency of his country, he was still only its first citizen, blending with admirable grace the simple dignity of a grave ruler with the varied acquirements of philosophy and the frank and cordial affability of a gentleman.

His writings are all imbued by the same spirit. The declaration of independence, the revised code, the Notes on Virginia, like the various reforms which he executed or meditated, are the joint efforts of that originality which led the way in every advance towards improvement, of the learning by which they were defended, and of the honest enthusiasm for freedom which nothing could dispirit nor subdue.

His very style partook of that character. Its felicity consisted in the freshness and originality of its expression and the terse form into which his strength of thought was compressed. There might be discovered, by a critical eye, some tendency towards new shades of expression as well as of thought, but too of that tinge of

gallicism imputed to Hume and Gibbon as the result of their residence abroad. But the general mould of his style was formed at an early age before he left America, and preserved its peculiarity through life. His correspondence was particularly attractive, combining the natural graces of manner with the rich materials of thought and presenting in an endless variety the vivacity and the captivating unreserve which form the charm of epistolary writing. That however which we may most usefully imitate is its conciseness. It would be a signal addition even to his services, if his example could wean us from that fatal love of words, that declamatory profusion, by which all the real business of life is oppressed and which threaten to confine the knowledge of our public affairs to those only who possess diligent leisure.

The same temper accompanied him to his highest station, and rendered him a bold and fearless chief magistrate,—qualities singularly valuable in this country. The tendency and the danger of other governments is subserviency to courts, that of ours is submission to popular excitement, which statesmen should often rather repress than obey. Undoubtedly the public councils should reflect the public sentiment; but that mirror may be dimmed by being too closely breathed on, nor can all the other qualities of a public man ever supply the want of personal independence. It is that fatal want which renders so many ostensible leaders in fact only followers, which makes so many who might have been statesmen degenerate into politicians, and tends to people the country with the slaves and the victims of that mysterious fascination, the love of popularity. Jefferson felt himself strong in his own originality. His administration was a conflict between those who had gained the power from which they had deemed them-

selves proscribed—and those who, outnumbered yet not vanquished, yielded with a stubborn resistance the heights from which they were descending. But the self-possessed and balanced mind of the leader bore him proudly through the struggle. His commanding spirit restrained the ardour of his followers, and even in the flush of victory his triumph was stained by no excesses. But the mildest use of authority is obnoxious to reproach, and—as the want of power to persecute each other for religion has driven all our fanaticism into politics—the enmities against him were so embittered as to form almost a reproach on our nature, were it not redeemed by the reflection that he outlived all these calumnies till even the most violent of his enemies were subdued into admiration of him. It was indeed a rare example of magnanimity to see this magistrate, the perpetual object of scorn and obloquy, content with the consciousness of its injustice, and never tempted to employ his influence or the power of the law to suppress it, satisfied, to use his own happy expression, that “error of opinion may be safely tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.” He did wisely in this. The press in our country, like the monitor in the Roman triumph who stood beside the victor to guard him against the illusions of prosperity, is privileged to pour its warnings into the ear of successful ambition; and its rough licence may well be borne as the price of freedom, and the tax on distinction.

But, whatever might be deemed of the measures of his administration, the accomplishments requisite for his station could not be denied to him. The chief magistracy of this country,—the highest political elevation to which any private man can now aspire without crime or revolution—that reward of ambition whose temptations allure

so many and should make us forgive so much,—may be not ingloriously administered by fortunate mediocrity, if it be content meekly to inscribe its name on our political olympiads. But when the man adorns the station—when its powers are nobly exercised and its honours gracefully worn, he may not yield in dignity of place to any whom the accidents of birth or fortune have raised to supreme authority. In the bearings of his personal character, Jefferson can be safely compared with the contemporary rulers of nations, not excepting him—the greatest of them all; nor need our patriotism shrink from the singular contrast between two men, chiefs for nearly an equal period of their respective countries, and models of their different species,—Napoleon, the emperor of a great nation—and Jefferson, the chief magistrate of a free people.

Of that extraordinary being it is fit to speak with the gentleness due to misfortune. Two centuries have scarce sufficed to retrieve the fame of Cromwell from that least expiable of crimes—his success over a feeble and profligate race, more fortunate in their historian than their history: and the memory of Napoleon must long atone equally for his elevation and his reverses. There are already those who disparage his genius, as if this were not to humble the nations who stood dismayed before it. Great talents, varied acquirements, many high qualities, enlightened views of legislation and domestic policy, it were bigotry to deny to Napoleon. The very tide of his conquests over less civilized nations, deposited in receding some benefits even to the vanquished—and all that glory can contribute to public happiness, was profusely lavished on his country. But in the midst of this gaudy infatuation there was that which disen-

chanted the spell—that which struck its damp chill into the heart of any man who, undazzled by the vulgar decorations of power, looked only at the blessings it might confer, and who weighed, instead of counting, these victories. Such are the delusions which military ambition sheds in turn on its possessor and on the world, that its triumphs begin with the thoughtless applause of its future victims, and end in the maddening intoxication of its own prosperity. We may not wonder then if, when those who should have first resisted his power were foremost in admiration and servility—when the whole continent of Europe was one submissive dependence on his will—when among the crowd of native and stranger suppliants who worshipped before this idol there was only one manly and independent voice to rebuke his excesses in a tone worthy of a free people—that of the representative of Jefferson, we may not wonder if all the brilliant qualities which distinguished the youth of Napoleon were at last concentrated into a spirit of intense selfishness, and that the whole purpose to which his splendid genius was perverted was the poor love of swaying the destinies of other men—not to benefit, not to bless—but simply to command them, to engross every thing, and to be every thing. It was for this that he disturbed the earth with his insane conquests,—for this that the whole freedom of the human mind—the elastic vigour of the intellect—all the natural play of the human feelings—all free agency, were crushed beneath this fierce and immitigable dominion, which, degrading the human race into the mere objects and instruments of slaughter, would soon have left nothing to science but to contrive the means of mutual destruction, and nothing to letters except to flatter the common destroyer. Contrast this feverish restlessness

which is called ambition—this expanded love of violence which makes heroes—contrast these, as they shone in the turbulent existence of Napoleon; with the peaceful disinterested career of Jefferson; and in all the relations of their power—its nature, its employment, and its result—we may assign the superiority to the civil magistrate.

Napoleon owed his elevation to military violence—Jefferson to the voluntary suffrage of his country. The one ruled sternly over reluctant subjects—the other was but the foremost among his equals who respected in his person the image of their own authority. Napoleon sought to enlarge his influence at home by enfeebling all the civil institutions, and abroad by invading the possessions of his neighbours—Jefferson preferred to abridge his power by strict constructions, and his counsels were uniformly dissuasive against foreign wars. Yet the personal influence of Jefferson was far more enviable, for he enjoyed the unlimited confidence of his country—while Napoleon had no authority not conceded by fear; and the extortions of force are evil substitutes for that most fascinating of all sway—the ascendancy over equals. During the undisputed possession of that power, Napoleon seemed unconscious of its noblest attribute, the capacity to make man freer or happier; and no one great or lofty purpose of benefiting mankind, no generous sympathy for his race, ever disturbed that sepulchral selfishness, or appeased that scorn of humanity, which his successes almost justified—But the life of Jefferson was a perpetual devotion, not to his own purposes, but to the pure and noble cause of public freedom. From the first dawning of his youth his undivided heart was given to the establishment of free principles—free institutions—freedom in all its varieties of untrammelled



thought and independent action. His whole life was consecrated to the improvement and happiness of his fellow men; and his intense enthusiasm for knowledge and freedom was sustained to his dying hour. Their career was as strangely different in its close as in its character. The power of Napoleon was won by the sword—maintained by the sword—lost by the sword. That colossal empire which he had exhausted fortune in rearing broke before the first shock of adversity. The most magnificently gorgeous of all the pageants of our times—when the august ceremonies of religion blessed and crowned that soldier-emperor, when the allegiance of the great captains who stood by his side, the applauses of assembled France in the presence of assenting Europe, the splendid pomp of war softened by the smiles of beauty, and all the decorations of all the arts, blended their enchantments as that imperial train swept up the aisles of Notre Dame—faded into the silent cabin of that lone island in a distant sea. The hundred thousands of soldiers who obeyed his voice—the will which made the destiny of men—the name whose humblest possessor might be a king—all shrunk into the feeble band who followed the captivity of their master. Of all his foreign triumphs not one remained, and in his first military conquest—his own country, which he had adorned with the monuments of his fame, there is now no place even for the tomb of this desolate exile.—But the glory of Jefferson became even purer as the progress of years mellowed into veneration the love of his countrymen. He died in the midst of the free people whom he had lived to serve; and his only ceremonial, worthy equally of him and of them, was the simple sublimity of his funeral triumph. His power he retained as long as he desired it, and then voluntarily restored the trust, with a permanent

addition—derived from Napoleon himself—far exceeding the widest limits of the French empire—that victory of peace which outweighs all the conquests of Napoleon, as one line of the declaration of independence is worth all his glory.

But he also is now gone. The genius, the various learning, the private virtues, the public honours, which illustrated and endeared his name, are gathered into the tomb, leaving to him only the fame, and to us only the remembrance, of them. Be that memory cherished without regret or sorrow. Our affection could hope nothing better for him than this long career of glorious and happy usefulness, closed before the infirmities of age had impaired its lustre; and the grief that such a man is dead, may be well assuaged by the proud consolation that such a man has lived.

## NOTE.

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I AM indebted to the kindness of Dr Mease for permission to transcribe the following letters on the subject of the house in which the declaration of independence was written.

Monticello, Sep. 16, 1825.

Dear Sir,

It is not for me to estimate the importance of the circumstances concerning which your letter of the 8th makes inquiry. They prove, even in their minuteness, the sacred attachments of our fellow citizens to the event of which the paper of July 4, 1776 was but the declaration, the genuine effusion of the soul of our country at that time. Small things may perhaps, like the relics of saints, help to nourish our devotion to this holy bond of our union, and keep it longer alive and warm in our affections. This effect may give importance to circumstances however small.—At the time of writing that instrument I lodged in the house of a Mr Graaf, a new brick-house three stories high, of which I rented the second floor, consisting of a parlour and bed room ready furnished. In that parlour I wrote habitually, and in it wrote this paper particularly. So far I state from written proofs in my possession. The proprietor Graaf was a young man, son of a German, and then newly married. I think he was a bricklayer, and that his house was on the south side of Market street, probably between 7th and 8th streets, and if not the only house on that part of the street, I am sure there were few others near it. I have some idea

that it was a corner house, but no other recollections throwing any light on the question or worth communication. I am ill, therefore only add assurance of my great respect and esteem.

TH. JEFFERSON.

*Dr James Mease,  
Philadelphia.*

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Monticello, Oct. 30, 1825.

Dear Sir,

Your letter of Sept. 8, inquiring after the house in which the declaration of independence was written, has excited my curiosity to know whether my recollections were such as to enable you to find out the house.—A line on the subject would oblige,

Dear Sir, Yours,

TH. JEFFERSON.

*Dr Mease.*

Mr Jefferson was correct in his recollections, and the house is known to be that mentioned in the text.







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